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A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

MAYOR's CHAPEL, in EXETER,

SEPTEMBER 17th, 1788,

BEFORE A

SOCIETY OF GENTLEMEN,

EDUCATED AT THE

GRAMMAR FREE-SCHOOL,

IN THAT CITY.

By JOHN MARSHALL, M. A.

MASTER OF THE SCHOOL.

EXETER:

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BRITISH MUSEUM

To STEPHEN HAWTREY, Esq.
BARTHOLOMEW PARR, M.D.
The Rev. GEORGE RHODES,
JOHN SHAPLEIGH, Esq.
} Stewards.

And to the whole SOCIETY of GENTLEMEN,

EDUCATED AT THE

GRAMMAR FREE-SCHOOL, in Exeter,

This SERMON,

PREACHED AND PRINTED AT THEIR PARTICULAR REQUEST,

Is, WITH ALL GRATITUDE, INSCRIBED

BY THEIR OBLIGED AND

OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

An ABSTRACT of the PROCEEDINGS and RULES OF THE Exeter Grammar Free-School Society.

AT a Meeting on the 23d of January 1787, it was agreed, that the Society ſhould be open to every Gentleman who had received any Part of his Education at the above School, being introduced by a Member, and paying for a Ticket, to be had at the Bar of the Inn where the Meeting was to be held.

The Price of the Ticket to be One Guinea, Six Shillings to be applied to the Expences of the Meeting, the Surplus to remain at the Diſpoſal of the Society.

At a ſecond Meeting on the 20th of February 1787, it was agreed, that the Ticket of Admiſſion ſhould be delivered only to a Perſon bringing a written Order from one of the ſubſcribing Members.

That every one introduced ſhould ſign the Rules of the Society, if he wiſhed to be conſidered as a Member in future.

That all ſubſcribing Members ſhould be conſidered as Annual Contributors of One Guinea, whether preſent or abſent, and that the Secretary ſhould be empowered to demand it.

The Times of meeting to be properly advertiſed.

At

The Stewards appointed were the Rev. JOHN ANDREW, RICHARD ROSE DREWE, Eſq. Lt. Col. SIMCOE, JAMES WHITE, Eſq.

Treaſurer and Secretary Mr. GEORGE SHORT.

At a third Meeting on the 5th of September 1787, it was reſolved, that Prizes ſhould be given from the common Fund, to the Scholars of the Grammar Free-School of Exeter, as an Encouragement to Claſſical Learning.

The Prizes to conſiſt of an Edition of ſome Claſſical Author, of Three Guineas value, for the beſt original Compoſition in Latin Proſe; and of another, value Two Guineas, for the ſecond-beſt Compoſition.

The Books to be marked with ſome Signature, ſpecifying them to be the honorary Donation of the Society, and to be ſigned by the Maſter and Stewards.

The Scholars obtaining the Prizes, to inſert their Compoſitions in a Book kept for that Purpoſe, and recite them to the Society before the Anniverſary Dinner.—Stewards appointed, Dr. PARR, the Rev. GEORGE RHODES, STEPHEN HAWTREY, and JOHN SHAPLEIGH, Eſqrs.

The Rev. Mr. MARSHALL, Maſter of the School, was requeſted to preach a Sermon on the next Anniverſary.

At a fourth Meeting, on the 17th of September 1788, it was agreed, that the Anniverſary ſhould be held for the future on the ſecond Thurſday in September.

That

That a Sermon ſhould be preached annually in the Chapel oppoſite the School; and that the ſenior Clergyman of the Society ſhould, in turn, be requeſted to preach it.

That on the Anniverſary, the Society ſhould meet in the School-Room at Eleven in the Forenoon, proceed immediately to the Chapel, from thence return to the School, and hear the Boys recite their compoſitions.

That all Buſineſs relating to the Society ſhould be diſcuſſed in the School-Room, after the Recitation; and that to bind the Society to any Reſolutions, twenty Members ſhould be preſent.

That the Rev. Mr. MARSHALL ſhould be requeſted to print the excellent Sermon, he had preached that morning.

That for the future, the Stewards elect, together with the Maſter, ſhould give out the Theſis for the Compoſitions three months previous to the Anniverſary, and that a Copy of them ſhould be delivered one Month previous to that Time to each of the Stewards, who ſhould adjudge the Prizes on the Monday preceding the Anniverſary.

That the Prizes, for the two Latin Compoſitions, then juſt recited, ſhould be given to Mr. GEORGE MOORE, and Mr. JOHN BLACKALL.

Stewards appointed,—JOHN JEFFERY SHORT, Eſq. the Rev. JOHN CHURCHILL, Dr. DOWNMAN, and the Rev. RICHARD HOLE.

A LIST

A LIST of the PRESENT SUBSCRIBING MEMBERS.

REVEREND John Andrew
Mr. N. Arthur
Rev. George Bent
Rev. Gilbert Burrington
Mr. Joſeph Burrow
Mr. Samuel Codrington
Peter Churchill, Eſq.
Mr. William Collyns
Nathaniel Elias Coſſerat, Eſq.
Rev. John Churchill
Rev. Samuel Cake
Richard Roſe Drew, Eſq.
Edward Drewe, Eſq.
Dr. Downman
John Dennis, Eſq.
Mr. William Spicer Dix
Mr. John Dacie
Rev. William Ellicombe
Rev. Hugh Ellicombe
Vicary Gibbs, Eſq.
Mr. Anthony Gibbs
Mr. Edmund Granger
Mr. John Guard
Mr. John Green
Stephen Hawtrey, Eſq.
Mr. William Holwell
Rev. Richard Hole
Rev. Edward Honywood
W. J. Hale, Eſq.
Mr. Thomas Hobbs
William Hole, Eſq.
Mr. William Jackſon
Mr. William Jackſon, Jun.
Mr. William Kennaway
Mr. Henry Ley
Mr. Samuel Luſcombe
Mr. Thomas Land
Rev. Francis Moore
Rev. William Marler
Mr. William Moore
Rev. S. Newbery
Mr. John Newcombe
Mr. George Nutcombe
Dr. Parr
Mr. N. Peters
Mr. Thomas Prowſe
Mr. Sydenham Pepin
Rev. George Rhodes
George Roberts, Eſq.
Rev. Richard Rous
John Shapleigh, Eſq.
Lieut. Col. Simcoe
John Henry Southcote, Eſq.
John Jeffery Short, Eſq.
Rev. William Short, Jun.
Mr George Short
Mr. Richard Stephens
Mr. Robert Trewman
James White, Eſq.
John Morth Woollcombe, Eſq.
Dr. Woollcombe
Rev. Philip Woollcombe
Rev. William Woollcombe
Rev. William Williams
Mr. John Williams
Mr. Benjamin Webber.

BRITISH MUSEUM 6 JUN

ST. JOHN ix. 5.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

THERE are no books ſo worthy your attention and ſtudy as the ſacred books, particularly the books of the New Teſtament, whether you would wiſh to entertain the underſtanding or improve the heart, whether you would conſult the intereſts of this world or thoſe of the next.

Of the books of the New Teſtament, the Goſpels are the principal; and of the Goſpels, a conſiderable part are the miracles of our bleſſed Saviour, curious yet credible and inſtructing wonders, which equally attract the notice of the young, and exerciſe the wiſdom of the old.

The miracle in this chapter, which is related at greater length, and with more circumſtances than uſual, affects and fills the mind of the attentive reader with a great variety of agreeable reflections: but neither the time nor this audience will allow of any thing to be drawn from it, that ſhall not bear ſome relation

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lation to the occaſion of this meeting. I ſhall only, therefore, make a remark or two upon it.

1. I may ſay of this miracle, what may be ſaid of our Saviour's miracles of healing in general, that the firſt thing in the intention of the Patient was not the firſt in his. All the Patient deſired, was to be cured of his bodily infirmity: this our Saviour graciouſly granted: but he conferred alſo upon the man a gift of infinitely greater value, of which he had no expectation nor conception, the forgiveneſs of his ſins. Thus Jeſus appeared in his true character the Saviour, the phyſician of the ſoul, as the Prophets had foretold, and as the Angel had proclaimed, who announced his birth.

Moreover by ſhewing the connection between ſin and death, between the health of the ſoul and everlaſting life, he confirmed the account which Moſes delivered, that ſin brought into the world pain and ſickneſs and death and all its woe, and that there is no indemnity from theſe evils, but by innocency of life, no eſcape from them but by repentance and amendment. By this manner of treating the ſick, at the ſame time that he cured the diſeaſes of the body, he rectified, enlarged, and enlightened the ſoul.

2. It may be obſerved on the manner of our Saviour's performing his cures, that he conſulted the benefit of thoſe, who happened to be eye-witneſſes of them. It was his cuſtom to im-

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print upon the ſtanders-by ſome inſtruction, that generally aroſe from the occaſion, to make the benefit of the miracle extend from the invalid to every perſon preſent that had ears to hear and a heart to underſtand him: for this gracious friend of men loſt no opportunity of doing good.

To this it may be added, as it was his deſign that a hiſtory of his miracles and preaching ſhould be publiſhed to the world, he would have Chriſtians of all future time enjoy the ſame benefit; to which they are powerfully invited by the very ſtory; for it is told with ſo affecting a ſimplicity and ſo agreeably to truth, that we think ourſelves preſent at the miracle, and hearing the words of the text "*As long as I am in the world, I am the* "*light of the world.*"

The words were ſpoken in alluſion to the miracle our Saviour was going to perform, and are as ſtrictly true as proper: for to whatever extent you can conceive the ſun to be the light of this viſible world, Jeſus Chriſt is completely ſo of the ſpiritual. By his preaching and miracles, as by ſo many illuminations, he has diſſipated the darkneſs of ignorance, with which all nations of men had been overſpread. To the informations which reaſon had derived from the creation, and from Providence, from reflections on the nature of man and his duty as a creature accountable to his maker, Chriſt has added not only a certainty of evidence, but alſo many important particulars never before made known.

known. Reaſon, indeed, ſaw and told mankind that there was but one God; but reaſon was too weak to ſave them from falling into idolatry, from "giving the glory of the creator to the creature," and from worſhipping many Gods. Reaſon ſaw, not without grief, how vicious and corrupted the world was grown; but the world, in ſpite of reaſon, went on ſtill increaſing in iniquity. Reaſon ſaw that there was a guilt in ſin, which muſt be offenſive to a pure and holy God, and ſhe drew, indeed, ſome hope of pardon from his mercy; but reaſon knew not on what to ground that hope. Reaſon ſaw that there was a ſtate of immortality; but reaſon could not preſerve men from fears and doubts, and a life of perpetual bondage. All theſe evils the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt has diſperſed; all theſe doubts and fears, all the ignorance and all the weakneſs of man he has removed, by giving us a brighter glimpſe of him who dwelleth in light inacceſſible, by aſſuring us of pardon and aſſiſtance through his atonement and interceſſion, and by preſenting to the eye of reaſon, an unclouded view of life and immortality: and farther, as the ſun diffuſes its light through all the regions of the earth, ſo the light of revelation, the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, was extended to and preached among all nations.*

To ſhew how greatly the world, bad as it may be thought, and defective in virtue and morality, has nevertheleſs been improved by the coming of Chriſt, would be the moſt natural uſe I could make

* See Monſ. Saurin's 36th Sermon.

make of the text; and were I preaching to a popular audience, and on an ordinary day, my duty would lead me to attempt that, and to incite my hearers to make ſuch an uſe of the bright beams that Chriſt hath caſt upon his church, and ſo to walk in the light of his truth, that they might at length attain to the light of everlaſting life: but upon this day, and before this ſociety, who are laudably met together to encourage and enlarge our little ſphere of human learning, with which are naturally and uſually joined ſobriety, civility, generoſity, and honour, and whatever is of good report, I may be permitted to deviate from the ordinary buſineſs of a pulpit diſcourſe, and obſerve, from the text, what great improvements the Chriſtian religion has made in the world in reſpect of literature alſo.

It were eaſy to prove this by deductions from hiſtory; but it would not be ſo eaſy to confine, within the limits of a ſermon, the proofs with which hiſtory abounds. Excepting Greece (for almoſt all the learning that Italy could boaſt, was derived immediately from thence, as were, in a great meaſure, its inhabitants alſo; and therefore though the times, in which the two nations diſtinguiſhed themſelves, were ſucceſſive and diſtant, yet my argument may conſider them as one people), all nations, in ſome degree, reſembled the world in its primitive ſtate, before the hand of the Almighty had reduced it into order, a rude undigeſted maſs, without letters, without arts, without civility,

and hardly having the ſkill to procure to themſelves the decent conveniencies of life.

The terms Barbariſm and Barbarian, which the Greeks applied without diſtinction to every foreign people, and which all ſucceeding nations have adopted, when they would expreſs extreme ignorance and incivility, and would characterize perſons without ſcience, ſeem to be another proof of this. It may appear to ſome, that the Greeks were guilty of conceit and arrogance in the uſe of theſe terms. Theſe are airs and the pride of learning. But, whatever judgement you may paſs upon them, the fact was even ſo: no nation was worthy to be looked upon in any other light, nor deſerving any other appellation, than Barbarians, in compariſon of thoſe highly cultivated republicks.

The greateſt bleſſings which God has beſtowed upon mankind, next after the ineſtimable gift of his beloved Son, are reaſon and genius. It cannot, indeed, be denied, that men are too apt to value themſelves for excelling others in theſe fine endowments: "not that they are to be deemed proud merely "because they know that they have them; for then it would be "a reputation to be a blockhead, if a man might not know he "has a genius without offence." Whenever a nation, or an individual, ſtands ſo high on theſe gratuitous accompliſhments, as to look down with ſcorn on others of leſs ſhining parts, it may not be improper to apply this queſtion of St. Paul, "what haſt

"thou

" thou that thou haſt not received?" God knows we have very little originality in our make to be proud of; for "every good "and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights."

There is ſomething, however, which may in ſome ſort be called our own, the application of thoſe divine gifts, the virtue to make a right uſe of them, and the induſtry to improve them. The light of nature informs us, that we are accountable here, and revelation ſpeaks more forcibly to the point; for "the earth "that drinketh in the rain, which cometh often upon it, if it "bringeth forth briers and thorns, is rejected and nigh unto "curſing;" this is true, with reſpect to the underſtanding as well as to the heart and conduct, in an intellectual as well as in a moral and religious view. And ſhall nations, or individuals, be thought proudly dealt with, if they are ſtigmatized as barbarians, who ſuffer their reaſon to be debauched by appetite, and the growth of their genius checked by indolence, or weakened by attention to trifles?

To deny that there is any difference between the natural powers of men would be abſurd and contradictory to all experience: but, perhaps, the greater difference between them lies in theſe points—the exerciſe of reaſon, the culture of the underſtanding, and, without which nothing great and good was ever produced, the glorious ambition to excel. And this I would apply to the enlightened times of Greece, compared to

the darkneſs of the world beſides; for ſurely from thoſe virtues, and not from natural genius only it came to paſs, that within the ſpace of about one hundred years, Athens reached in human ſcience almoſt every thing that was great, and ſtriking, and ſublime.

It ſeems as if Providence had deſigned this little territory to be for the time an exception to the general depravity of the human underſtanding; that he might vindicate his dealings with men, and convince them that he had given powers ſufficient for the happineſs of this world at leaſt, if properly exerciſed and properly exerted; and by ſhewing to other nations what Greece had actually done, that he might raiſe in them an emulation to copy after ſuch illuſtrious patterns, or leave them without excuſe if they ſtill continued in the darkneſs of ignorance and ſloth. We do not find, however, that many happy effects were the conſequence; but on the contrary, that the luſtre of Greece itſelf, after the period I have mentioned, began to dwindle into a faint glimmer, hardly viſible to the reſt of the world, and but little diſtinguiſhable from the general gloom: for they wanted the ſun of righteouſneſs to ariſe; in the abſence of whoſe auſpicious light the force of nature is at a ſtand, and all human efforts fail.

Had I the ability, I have not room enough to give this argument its whole extent, and to lay it at full length before you: and, therefore, I may appear too contracted, and may have excited your ſurprize, if not your cenſure, by taking

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ſuch notice of Athens, to the ſeeming neglect of Rome; unleſs you ſhall be of opinion that I have, in ſome meaſure, obviated a reflection of that kind, by conſidering the latter as deſcended from and the genuine offspring of the former, the inheritor as it were of its learning and of its glory. The virtues of emulation and induſtry in cultivating the mind, the beſt proofs of an enlightened people, no one will deny to the Romans; the obligations they have laid poſterity under may have been more extenſive, perhaps of greater uſe, than thoſe we owe even to the Greeks—but I do not mean to draw a compariſon between them, thinking it ſufficient for my preſent purpoſe to have directed your eye principally to the grand originals, from whom, whatever additions were made in after times, it muſt be univerſally admitted, the Roman excellence took its riſe.

You will alſo go before me in obſerving, that I have confined myſelf to thoſe nations and times from whence that kind of learning, which you honour with your patronage, and which is alſo honoured with the reſpectable title of claſſical learning, is more immediately derived. Not that the argument would fail, were I to take in the learning of the eaſt, and the wiſdom of Egypt: for however apt a veneration for antiquity and a reſpect for the productions of our forefathers are to magnify the merits of the ages paſt, the compariſon, though it may afford a ſubject for wit to play on, will yield a deciſion infinitely to the advantage of the days of Chriſtianity.

It would be far from a difficult taſk to account for this in a ſatisfactory manner, if the time would permit. Nor ſhould I find it neceſſary to draw immediate aid from the ſacred ſcriptures, from that ſupernatural and inſpired wiſdom which all the enemies of Chriſtianity were not able to gainſay or reſiſt. That the ſuperiority of learning was on the ſide of the Chriſtian profeſſors, after the miraculous aſſiſtances were withdrawn, appears from hence, that excepting their patience and fortitude and virtue, their defenſive armour, they had no weapon but their pen to wield againſt their opponents. The intereſt and power of their adverſaries, the zeal for the old Pagan rights, the ſhame to be ſurpaſſed by a religion of yeſterday, the loſs of reputation and emoluments—as all theſe cauſes excited and ſharpened every faculty of the underſtanding in the Pagans, it required ſuperior abilities in the Chriſtians to conquer ſo ſtrong an oppoſition. I may add, that even the ſects into which Chriſtianity was broken, though they unhappily deſtroyed the charity, contributed to preſerve and advance the learning of Chriſtians. In ſhort as we have had, from the time of our bleſſed Saviour, much more certain information, we can ſpeak with much greater preciſion of the ſtate of learning in the world. We know from their works, which are ſtill remaining, that ſoon after the age of the Apoſtles, there were among the Chriſtians men eminent for their ſkill in every kind of literature, who wrote ſome in Greek,

Greek, others in the Roman language, with uncommon elegance and purity. We know, to come to later times, how much the revival of learning, after the dark ages of the church, was owing to Chriſtianity; and no one is ignorant what a wide field has been opened for the exerciſe and improvement of reaſon and genius, by the conteſts with the Deiſts, with the Roman Catholicks, and with ſectaries of every denomination. Let me add, that glorioufly hitherto hath the field been maintained, and we believe there never will be wanting learned and rational and ſound believers, who, armed with the ſpiritual weapons of Chriſt, and aſſiſted by the grace of God, ſhall be mighty in pulling down the ſtrong holds of Satan, and confuting all the enemies of the goſpel. Upon the whole, I ſcruple not to join in all the poſitiveneſs of a very learned author*, upon this argument:

" The knowledge of the learned languages, thoſe keys of erudition, the knowledge of the laws of nations, and of the laws of war and peace, of chronology, hiſtory, natural and moral philoſophy, the preſervation of ancient books and the illuſtration of them, critical and philological learning—all theſe things are owing to the ſtudy, the ſagacity, and induſtry of Chriſtians. If the goſpel had never been revealed, or had been ſtifled in its infancy, the world had been ſunk in the loweſt degree of barbarity and ignorance; ignorance of God and of religion, and of every thing that is valuable."

I will

* Dr. Jortin.

I will ſtretch your attention to one inference only from what has been ſaid.

It is no contradiction to the faith of a Chriſtian, or the hope of a ſtate of happineſs in Heaven, to believe, that our bleſſed Saviour deſigned the preſent life of three or fourſcore years upon earth to be a ſtate of happineſs too, and that, if we univerſally obeyed the goſpel, we ſhould find it ſo. There are many Chriſtians of a pious tendency, I believe, but ſurely caſt in a gloomy mould, who think that there is no road to Heaven but what leads through briers and thorns, becauſe our Saviour ſaid "ſtrait "is the gate that leadeth into life." Not to mention that this paſſage is moſt properly conſtrued of the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, what has made it a ſtrait gate? What has added to the difficulties of a Chriſtian life ſo greatly as the vices and follies and ignorance of men? You will find it ſet down in no page of the goſpel that we are to be neceſſarily unhappy here in order to be happy hereafter; but you may find much to the contrary, and that you may have the happineſs, becauſe you have the promiſe, of both worlds.

Almoſt every miracle our Saviour wrought is a confirmation of this, and when you hear him ſaying "I am the light of the "world," if you believe him too, you will rejoice in his light; you will experience a joy and gladneſs, the uſual attendants on light, ariſing in your hearts. You will alſo learn in what this

joy,

joy, this happineſs of a Chriſtian, conſiſts; in virtue and knowledge; and that you have a mind ſo formed as to be capable of making perpetual advances in the knowledge and faith of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Hence your duty will daily open more and more upon you, and lead you to make a daily progreſs in thoſe attainments; and the immediate conſequences will be joys more exquiſite than the libertine can boaſt, or ſenſuality give.

To conclude,—Intereſted as my ſchool is in your inſtitution, and diſtinguiſhed as I am myſelf by the duty I am now performing, to take my leave of you and conclude in the manner of a common diſcourſe might be imputed to a falſe, perhaps an ungrateful, modeſty. I feel myſelf, indeed, in an uncommon and rather difficult ſituation, being leſs able, than willing, to do juſtice to your inſtitution, and afraid, at the ſame time, leſt I ſhould be thought to exceed the bounds of a juſt compliment ſo ſacredly fixed by this place, and guarded by your own preſence: yet, when I conſider with what excellent views you are met together, in themſelves how honourable, in their conſequences how likely to be beneficial, and worthy to take their beginning with the duties you have now performed, there ſeems to be greater reaſon why I ſhould be apprehenſive for my ſilence.

After having conducted this little ſeminary for ſo many years, no one will think that I can be indifferent to its proſperity, or unthankful for the means that are ſo likely to promote it: but

when I ſee before before me ſo great a number of its reſpectable pupils, many whoſe faces bring into my mind the pleaſing remembrance of their boyiſh years, all zealous for its intereſts, if I do not feel in my breaſt a more than ordinary warmth however unequal to the cauſe, if I do not exult in the proſpect of its ſucceſs, I ſhall be unworthy the reſpect, with which you honour its maſter, and appear loſt to the beſt feelings of my profeſſion.

Amidſt the feſtivity of this day, full of good nature and good affections; this ſocial meeting of old acquaintances renewed, acquaintances formed in what are commonly called our happieſt days; amidſt the chearful countenances of all here preſent, ariſing from the moſt genuine cauſe, the conſciouſneſs of acting, in the eyes of the public, a diſintereſted, a virtuous, and a Chriſtian part, nothing ſhall drop from me that may tend either to leſſen your ſatisfactions or gratify the malignity of any; if there be any, who can wiſh to break the unity of this ſociety, or to throw a reflection upon this meeting; as if your worthy deſigns were all to terminate in the poor buſineſs of a mere merry meeting.

Aſſured that you are diſpoſed to take every ſtep that human prudence ſuggeſts to ſecure the continuance, the increaſe, and the honour of this inſtitution; and relying on the favour of Heaven, whoſe bleſſing you have been now imploring, I will cheriſh the hope of ſeeing the happieſt conſequences from it. And, I truſt, you will all give me credit for my ſincerity both as the maſter

of

of this ſchool and as a miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, in profeſſing myſelf bound to pray for you, that God may bleſs you, particularly in the diſcharge of your paternal duty; and that he may return upon your own children, what you are labouring to encourage and promote for the benefit of others, all the advantages that are to be derived from a liberal, a virtuous, and a Chriſtian education.

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